

VZCZCXRO6783
PP RUEHHM
DE RUEHHI #2687 2960308
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 230308Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3769
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 2017
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFIUU/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS HANOI 002687

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; EB; EB/ESC/IEC (GALLOGLY)
USDOE FOR NNSA (MENDELSON, BOLSHINSKY, DICKERSON)

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: KNNP ENRG TRGY KIPR VM
SUBJECT: LOOSING TRACTION: S&T VICE MINISTER ON FUEL CONVERSION OF
VIETNAM'S RESEARCH REACTOR IN 2006

THIS CABLE IS SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED.

Ref: A) State 134614 B) Hanoi 2163 C) State 151900 D) State 160169

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On September 26, 2006, the Charg d'Affairs paid a return visit to Vice Minister of Science and Technology Tran Quoc Thang to seek the Government of Vietnam's (GVN) prompt approval for the fuel conversion of the Dalat research reactor and conclusion of two related agreements on assistance. While the Vice Minister reiterated his full support for the fuel conversion and hopes for continued support from the Department of Energy (DOE), it became clear that the issue is hung up in the GVN's bureaucratic processes and that the decision rests with the Prime Minister/Office of the Government. The Charg conveyed the intent of DOE's Deputy Assistant Secretary Andrew Bieniawski to meet with VM Thang on October 24 or 25 in Hanoi per reftel B and delivered talking points on the DOE's Sister Laboratory Cooperation program per reftel C. End summary.

Dalat Reactor Conversion

¶2. (SBU) On September 26, 2006, the Charg d'Affairs met with Vice Minister of Science and Technology Tran Quoc Thang to continue engagement with the GVN for the fuel conversion of Vietnam's research reactor and seek resolution on proposed nonproliferation assistance agreements. As reported (reftel B), the Ambassador's previous meeting underscored the scientific as well as political importance of moving forward on the fuel conversion project and concluding the two related agreements on nuclear non-proliferation prior to President Bush's visit in November.

¶3. (SBU) Flanked by leaders of the Vietnam Atomic Energy Commission (VAEC) and Vietnam Agency for Radiation and Nuclear Safety and Control (VARANSEC), the Vice Minister reiterated his support for the Russian Research Reactor Fuel Return program because it is fully in line with Vietnam's strategy for the peaceful use of nuclear energy. The Vice Minister reiterated hopes that the DOE will continue to support Vietnam's strategy to safely harness nuclear power for non-military purposes. The Vice Minister also stated that the Dalat research reactor is Vietnam's only nuclear reactor. (NOTE: The GVN has a strategy to construct a nuclear power facility in Ninh Thuan Province in south-central Vietnam by 2020.)

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: The Ministry of Science and Technology clearly recognizes the potential of long-term USG assistance for nuclear non-proliferation in Vietnam. Gaining traction on this issue, which has been under negotiation since early 2004, remains challenging given that MOST's enthusiasm for technical cooperation has bogged down in bureaucratic process. In attempts to generate momentum and garner needed political support from the GVN's Office of the

Government/Prime Minister, the Ambassador has raised the issue separately with the Deputy Foreign Minister. END COMMENT.

DOE DAS Bieniawski's Visit in October

15. (SBU) The Charg conveyed the intent of DOE's Deputy Assistant Secretary Andrew Bieniawski to meet with VM Thang on October 24 or

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25 in Hanoi. MOST has informed ESTHOFF that they are prepared to receive DAS Bieniawski and that they intend to send a response letter to the DOE shortly.

DOE Sister Laboratory Cooperation

16. (SBU) The Charg also delivered the Embassy's informal Vietnamese translation and color handout highlighting the DOE's Sister Laboratory Cooperation program as requested in reftel C. See septel for details

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